

The Food and Rural Economics Division (FRED)

Mission: to provide economic, social and demographic policy analysis on issues related to the food sector, consumers, rural America, and USDA food assistance programs. We are the major provider of statistics and information on rural America, food prices, food expenditures and the food supply. We are responsible for the Department's extramural Food Assistance and Nutrition Research Program (FANRP).

Research Focus:



Food Consumption and Nutrition — FRED examines the demographic, social, and economic determinants of food and nutrient consumption; interrelationships between food and non-food consumption; consumer valuation of quality, safety, and nutrition characteristics; and the role of information in determining food choices.



Food Assistance — FRED examines the adequacy and effectiveness of the Department's food assistance and nutrition programs, including the Food Stamp Program, WIC and the National School Lunch Program. We are particularly interested in long-term program outcomes and interactions among food assistance and income assistance.



Food Safety — FRED has responsibility for analyzing food safety issues, including consumer benefits from risk reduction, production tradeoffs in reducing hazards, impact of proposed regulations and international harmonization, and the implications of changing demographics on food safety economics.



Food Prices and Markets — FRED develops and monitors indicators of individual, household, and market level food consumption, prices, expenditures, and nutrients; food marketing costs, and farm-to-retail price spreads. FRED also analyzes the food processing and distribution sector, including the ability of the sector to meet changing consumer demands, the effect of government interventions to facilitate that response; and the effect of government interventions and rapid changes in the sector on consumer and producer welfare.



Rural Businesses and Services — FRED focuses on the analysis of the economic, social, and demographic factors influencing the infrastructure of rural communities, agribusiness activity and the industrial base of rural areas. In particular, FRED analyzes the development of rural portions of geographic regions of the United States, including changes in industry mix, tax policy, credit availability, and other economic activities, and means of measuring overall economic development. Another function is determining the effects of economic, social, and governmental policy on the demand for and supply of state and local government services including low-income assistance programs, the quality of such services, and the relationships between local services and the viability of families and communities, particularly in rural areas.



Rural People — FRED analyses rural population distribution and growth focusing on the relative roles of migration and natural increase. FRED monitors rural labor markets and analyzes the underlying factors affecting labor market dynamics. FRED also develops data on income distributions of people and evaluates the effectiveness of alternative public policies and programs for improving incomes of disadvantaged groups — youth, aged, and the poor. This includes analysis of rural housing conditions and the effectiveness of federal rural housing programs in meeting the needs of rural households.

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There are currently 106 people in the Division, including 85 economists, 1 geographer, 9 sociologists, 3 statisticians and 1 nutritionist. We have an active intern program and currently are supporting the doctoral research of 6 minority students. In addition, we sponsor 3 USDA/1890's National Scholars.

Recent FRED Publications:

Effects of Federal Tax Policy on Agriculture

Valuing the Health Benefits of Food Safety

Economics of Food Labeling

A Safety Net for Farm Households

Infant Formula Prices and Availability

We produce two periodicals, the *FoodReview* and *Rural America*. All of our work is readily available on the ERS website: www.ers.usda.gov. Some of our most frequently visited sites include: the Food and Nutrition Assistance briefing room; the Diet and Health briefing room; and our statistical section titled "The Rural Economy at a Glance." These sites attract about 6,000 to 11,000 visitors a month.